

The Natural Order of Disorder: Pedophilia, Stranger Danger and the Normalising Family

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Abstract Over the past two decades critics have challenged the validity of pedophilia as a mental disorder and have implored us to think differently about child sexuality as well as incidences of sexual contact and intimacy between adults and children or adolescents. This growing literature provides compelling evidence against using a medical framework for understanding and responding to pedophilia, yet most people in the English-speaking world still cling to a post-World War Two construction of the pedophile as a dangerous stranger, pathologically unable to control his insatiable sexual desire for young people. This article aims to address this particular dilemma. Drawing on the work of Ann Laura Stoler, it argues that the construction of the pedophile is a vector of normalisation processes, “a tactic in the internal fission of society into binary oppositions, and means of creating ‘biologized’ internal enemies, against whom society must defend itself”. As a social construction, the pedophile persists because it plays an important ideological function in modern society: it affirms the white, middle-class, ‘traditional’ heterosexual family as the ideal site for the production and reproduction of social and political norms.

Keywords Pedophilia · Homosexuality · Normalisation · Biopower · Moral panic

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Introduction

Is pedophilia a sexual orientation? A handful of experts in the behavioural sciences have described it as such since at least the 1980s, and pedophile and hebophile rights advocates soon followed (Freund 1981). Describing an enduring desire for pubescent or pre-pubescent people as an orientation draws on the language of psychiatry, psychology, and the social sciences to suggest that, whether biologically driven or acquired in childhood, one's sexual orientation is fixed and immutable. A descriptor which came into common usage in the 1980s, sexual orientation signaled a cultural shift away from condemnation, pathologisation and stigmatisation toward tolerance and understanding. Sexual orientation has been effectively mobilised by lesbian, gay and bisexual rights activists to normalise homosexuality as a benign variation and put same-sex sexual acts on equal footing with opposite-sex sexual acts (Duggan 2004). For over a decade now some pedophile and hebophile rights advocates have defended their sexual practices on the ground that their sexual orientation cannot be changed.

Few people regard pedophilia as a benign variation, of course, but since concern about sexual "predation," pedophilia, and child sexual abuse is not going away any time soon, it is worthwhile examining contemporary discourses about pedophilia more closely. This is no easy task. For most people, the whole topic is either best avoided, or it arouses such a strong emotional reaction that careful contemplation is quite simply not possible. In countries like the United States, the political climate is such that researchers and treatment practitioners who share findings that challenge present-day beliefs about pedophilia can find themselves subject to censure and their institutional positions endangered (Mirkin 2000; Rind et al. 1998). Nevertheless a handful of scholars in the psy¹ and social sciences and the humanities have taken steps towards re-thinking both childhood sexuality and the category pedophile (Angelides 2004; Egan and Hawkes 2009; Jackson 1982; Kincaid 1992; Kincaid 1998; Malón 2011; Moser 2009; Moser and Kleinplatz 2005; O'Carroll 1982; Roudinesco 2009; Zander 2005; Zucker 2002). They have shown that public and expert discourses² about pedophilia raise important questions about how we in the English-speaking west think, and do not think, about children and childhood, about sexuality, about the family, and about the role of medicine and the criminal and justice systems in regulating them.

¹ In his groundbreaking 1979 book *The policing of families*, Jacques Donzelot used the shortened term 'psy' to refer to psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis.

² Historians of sexuality have shown that sexual types, such as homosexuals, pedophiles, and heterosexuals even, are social constructions (Katz 1995). This is to say that the way we understand certain sexual types, indeed, even the notion of sexual types itself, is a product of culture, not nature (Burr 1995). Thus, while it is the case that adults do engage in sex with young children, the meanings we attach to those acts, to their impact on the child, and to the adult who performs or commits such acts, are historically and culturally constructed. This does not mean that such acts do not occur, nor does it mean that they are not experienced as painful for the child. It means simply that there are many ways of understanding these incidences and their consequences; that the way we understand them today is not necessarily any more or less real or truthful than the way they have been understood in different times and places. The greater our awareness of the constructed nature of sexuality, the more able we are to critically interrogate the ways we as a society respond to and regulate sex.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, most English-speaking westerners have regarded adult sexual desire for children as both a crime and a mental disorder. Unsatisfied with the legal limits the law imposes on sentencing, we created laws that send sex offenders to prison for indefinite periods of time. Westerners continue to invest many millions of dollars in mandatory treatments despite the fact that the myriad approaches pursued have failed to produce statistically significant results (Chenier 2008; Moser and Kleinplatz 2005; Zander 2005). Both the public and many experts continue to support and even expect mandatory medical treatment for sex offenders, particularly when the victim is below the age of eighteen.³ Pedophilia, it seems, cannot be cured, yet we remain stubbornly committed to the notion that without treatment adults (principally men) who sexually desire people under a certain age cannot control their desire for sexual contact with children and youth and will repeatedly act upon it. Both the public and the criminal justice system seem little concerned by the failure of behavioural scientists and psychiatrists to cure *any* type of sexual disorder, including pedophilia. Existing laws in Canada, the United States and elsewhere have, since the mid-twentieth century, enabled the indefinite incarceration of sex offenders beyond maximum prison sentences based on this belief. Although there have been a number of changes in both the realm of psychiatry and in law since the 1950s (Zander 2005), the basic approach and the fundamental beliefs about the nature of sex offending that underpin it have remained remarkably stable.

This article draws on empirical research and theoretical advances in the history of sexuality to suggest new explanations for the intractability of the pedophile as a social type. Since the 1960s lesbian and gay activists and social scientists and have worked hard to parse the homosexual from the pedophile, two constantly collapsing and overlapping categories, but the slippage between them is key to understanding how discourses about “stranger danger” structure the normal society. The dangerous stranger trope is intrinsic to what Michel Foucault calls “the natural order of disorder”. In his path-breaking book on the history of sexuality Foucault argues that aberrant sexualities are not suppressed but rather subject to analytical scrutiny and “made into a principle of classification and intelligibility” for the purpose of structuring and ordering the normal society (Foucault 1978). In the modern western state, the family is ground zero for sexual normalisation. By externalising threats to childhood innocence, “stranger danger” maintains the fiction of the family as safe haven from sexual danger. The construction of the pedophile is a vector of normalisation processes, “a tactic in the internal fission of society into binary oppositions, and means of creating ‘biologized’ internal enemies, against whom society must defend itself” (Stoler 1995, p. 59) and it persists because it plays an important ideological function in modern society: it affirms the white, middle-class, “traditional” heterosexual family as the ideal site for the production and reproduction of social and political norms. It is in this way that disorder is made a natural part of modern society, thus, “the natural order of disorder.”

³ Most experts defend the value of treatment despite the failure to produce meaningful results. Moreover, the language used in published research and the definitions of pedophilia laid out in the *DSM* all demonstrate what Paul Okami and Amy Goldberg call a structural slippage of legal and moral constructs in social scientific research on pedophilia (Okami and Goldberg 1992).

The Historical Origins of a Contemporary Type

Homosexuality and pedophilia were separate entries in foundational sexological texts like Krafft-Ebing's 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis*. By the 1930s, however, it became increasingly difficult to tell them apart (Jenkins 1998; Freedman 1989). In public discourse, this was due in large part to the popularisation of the medical terms "sex pervert" and, after World War Two, "sex deviant" (Chenier 2008). Historians suggest that the majority of sex offenders studied by medical and psychiatric experts in this period were homosexuals, but the pervert and the deviant were manifested in the popular imagination as shadowy male figures that threatened women and children (Minton 2002; Terry 1999).

The first laws that singled out men who committed sex crimes for special treatment were passed in the United States in the 1930s, and were popularised there and in Canada, New Zealand, and most Australian states after World War Two (Pratt 1998). Called criminal sexual psychopath laws, they allowed the state to impose an indefinite sentence on men who had committed a sex offence in which the victim was anyone other than an adult female. Grounded in positivist criminological thinking, sexual psychopath laws were premised on the notion that such persons were sex perverts or deviants and that traditional punishment would not change their behaviour, but that psychiatric or psychological treatment would (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry 1977; Pratt 1998). Based as it was on a medicalised understanding of sex crime, a finding of criminal sexual psychopathy required psychiatric testimony that an offender was unable or unlikely to control his sexual urges. On this basis the court assumed the offender was likely to reoffend and therefore sentenced him to an indefinite term to be served either in prison or in a state psychiatric facility. The principle of the law was that indeterminate sentencing would facilitate treatment, but in practice treatment was not always provided (Chenier 2008).

Significantly, there was no such medical condition as sexual psychopathy. The term sexual psychopath was first invented to explain the behaviour of prostitutes whose persistent return to sexual labour and whose failure to show remorse or regret for their actions, but who appeared to be of "normal" intelligence, defied explanation, at least for middle-class reformers (Jenkins 1998; Knupfer 2000). When Americans became anxious about male sexual offending in the 1930s, they drew on the notion of sexual psychopathy to create criminal sexual psychopath laws (Freedman 1989; Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry 1977). These laws further entrenched the relationship between the criminal justice system and mental health and medical experts. Just as significantly, the 'sex deviant' became a fixed character in popular culture (Chenier 2008; Pratt 1998). As we shall see, the same set of attributes that defined the sexual psychopath in the 1930s, attributes that also defined homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s, define the pedophile today.

From the very beginning criminal sexual psychopath legislation was the subject of considerable debate among medical professionals and treatment specialists (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry 1977; Jenkins 1998). Many strongly opposed this particular legislative innovation. There was no cure for sexual deviation, experts argued, and singling out offenders whose crimes were of a sexual

nature as distinctly disordered had no foundation in modern psychiatry. In Canada, where criminal sexual psychopath legislation was introduced in 1948, most psychiatrists regarded sexual deviant behaviour as an effect of a deeper problem, not its cause. Moreover, they believed mental health treatment should be prioritised according to individual prisoners' psychological needs, not the type of criminal behaviour in which they engaged.⁴ With the support of the public behind them, local legislatures forged ahead anyway (Chenier 2008). As a consequence, sexual psychopath laws and statutes put in place a treatment regime within the criminal justice and mental health systems, and in so doing invented an entire multi-disciplinary field of specialisation.

There are a number of important observations worth making here. First, the invention of sexual psychopathy was not the result of a theoretical advance or research breakthrough. It was the result of a fear-mongering campaign launched by politicians and sustained by the press and an anxious public against the judgment of many medical and legal experts. As a result of sexual psychopath legislation, however, the treatment of 'sexual psychopathy,' a condition that did not exist in psychiatric terms but was invented in American legislatures, became a major driving force behind the evolution and growth of psychiatric and psychological research and treatment for sexual deviation. This finding has implications for present-day debates concerning the paraphilias, in particular pedophilia, as it appears in the DSM. Critics of the construction of pedophilia as a mental disease point out that homosexuality was delisted from the DSM by democratic vote, not as a result of developments in the area of psychiatric research or treatment thereby suggesting that the paraphilias lack scientific validity. Looking a few decades further into the past to the emergence of sexual psychopathy further strengthens this argument; the social and political (vs. medical and biological) underpinnings of pedophilia becomes even more apparent.

Another observation builds on the well-established insight that mental health experts have long operated as an extension of regulatory and disciplinary systems (Donzelot 1979). The identification of deviant populations, and of sexually problematic behaviours in particular, works in complementarity with and, as in the case of criminal sexual psychopath legislation, in the service of, legal regimes which also seek to normalise and manage populations. Whether or not we regard the relationship between medicine and the law as progressive or problematic, medicine exists in relationship to prevailing social values, cultural conceptions, and political imperatives. For these reasons, a critical examination of pedophilia as a mental disorder must engage with more than the history of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM). DSM definitions do not exist outside of culture and society; they depend on them. Moreover, what constitutes 'sexual deviation' is not defined solely by the DSM. It is defined by the

⁴ Sexual crimes committed against adult women were not considered deviant since the "outlet", an adult female, was "normal". Feminist activism around issues of sexual violence means that serial rapists are now more likely to be considered dangerous offenders but people who engage in sex with children only have to engage in such behaviour once to be considered a dangerous offender. This discrepancy says as much about the status of women as it does about the politics of sexual pathology.

entire social concept that circulates in popular and political culture and winds its way through the courts and back to the clinic.

In its post-World War Two heyday, sexual psychopath laws were used extensively to incarcerate and civilly commit homosexual men in prisons, jails and mental health institutions (Chauncey 1993; Chenier 2008; Pratt 1998). Psychiatrists never were able to cure homosexuality, of course, but a new therapeutic opportunity emerged on the horizon. Just when North Americans were growing weary of the post-war homosexual panic, battered child syndrome was discovered and child abuse emerged as a major social problem. By the mid-1970s, a significant shift occurred. Public interest shifted to child sexual abuse (Jenkins 1998). Whereas child abuse drew the eye into the family, child sexual abuse displaced the gaze onto a very familiar figure: the Stranger.

In the early 1970s the pedophile largely displaced the homosexual as the object of medical, criminal, and popular concern and anxiety. Though clearly a distinct social and sexual type, when we look closely at the cluster of ideas that defined the homosexual as menace in the 1950s and 1960s compared to the pedophile of the 1970s and after, it is striking how much the same they are. While the personage these characteristics describe has changed, the characteristics themselves have not:

1. He is an outsider, unknown to the family; he is everywhere. This figure embodies 'stranger danger,' a term first popularised by the 1949 Sid Davis education film *Dangerous Stranger* which instructed children on how to keep themselves safe from the threat of kidnapping and sexual assault by unfamiliar male adults. We continue to warn children to be on guard against friendly approaches by unfamiliar men.
2. He is immature; he suffers from arrested development. Based on a mélange of sexological and childhood development theories, there exists a belief that both the post-World War Two homosexual and the present-day pedophile failed to progress through adolescence to full adult maturity. In the post-war era, when a high value was placed on domestic retrenchment, the homosexual's refusal to accept the responsibility of marriage and family was folded into this pathological paradigm, providing yet another example of the way nation-state imperatives have informed psychosexual diagnoses. Presently, it is pedophilic, not homosexual desire, which represents immature male homosexuality.
3. His sexual desire is uncontrollable and insatiable; as a consequence he lacks moral judgment and empathy. Driven by their infantile fixations, homosexuals/pedophiles are indifferent to the impact their actions have on others. Because they appear normal in every other way, however, they are psychopathic/sociopathic. Invisible but very much present behind these ideas is the model of normative male sexuality as a natural force in need of an outlet; civilised/mature men have simply learned how to control it. Since same-sex sex/adult-child sex was/is taboo, to act on such a desire is regarded as an inability to exercise control and, consequently, is regarded as failed masculinity. It is for this reason that in the popular imagination social and professional success and homosexuality/pedophilia were/are incongruous.

4. He threatens innocence and is a corrupting influence. Pedophilia and homosexuality were bound most tightly together in the post-war era when a public concern among baby boom parents over sexual assaults against children placed pressure on local police forces to “round up all known sex deviates,” the principal result being regular raids on gay male bars and arrests in parks and other known cruising spots. Chicago forces called it “fruit picking” (Kelleher 1952). Significantly at this time adolescence emerged as a distinct life stage. The period of childhood innocence was extended to age eighteen. That men over eighteen sometimes had sex with men under eighteen completed the loop: gay men corrupted the nation’s youth (Chenier 2008). Whatever we might think about intergenerational sex, at the root of the notion of corruption is the belief that homosexual sex and pre-pubertal sexual activity are not only deviant but dangerous and harmful; that an absence of desire and corporeal curiosity constitutes innocence; that homosexual and pre-pubertal desire is produced by way of introduction; and that the result of such an introduction is necessarily corrupting and traumatic, even if the child does not experience it in negative terms.⁵
5. Homosexuality and pedophilia are produced during childhood. In the postwar era mothers were blamed for causing male homosexuality by loving their sons too much. Contemporary specialist and popular cultural theories of pedophilia privilege childhood sexual victimisation as causal.
6. There is an escape hatch. Since at least the 1920s sex experts made a distinction between the true homosexual (I prefer sex with men) and the situational homosexual (I would have sex with a woman if one were available); the current literature on pedophilia distinguishes between the fixated pedophile (I prefer children), and those who only commit opportunistic sex crimes against children (I would have sex with an adult if one were available). These distinctions are critical in determining who will be treated as a sex criminal and who will be treated as a person who simply violated the criminal law. The former are subject to indefinite incarceration, mandatory psychiatric and psychological treatment programs, and sex offender registration laws; the latter are not. Social prejudice and economic privilege tend to determine how such distinctions are made.

Our present-day understanding of pedophilia is based on an early twentieth-century medical explanation of homosexual behaviour. The story that was told about homosexuality was discarded by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973, but only insofar as it meant same-sex sex between two consenting adults. The category itself, i.e. the very same set of ideas and assumptions about the nature of sexual desire, of sex drives, and sexual behaviour, informs the present conception of pedophilia. Moreover, in North America and Britain, neither the law nor psychiatry considers homosexuality a mental disorder or homosexuals pathological, yet the

⁵ A 1992 study of 501 adult women who recalled having sexual contact when they had been a child with an adult showed that 67% remembered their participation as voluntary. Only 25% reported their memories to be unpleasant. 32% reported negative reactions such as fear, anger or shock, 72% described it as not harmful and 82% described it as not abusive (Kilpatrick 1992; Mirkin 2000).

post-World War Two slippage between homosexuality and pedophilia persists, particularly in the United States where Christian fundamentalism figures prominently in public and political debates about matters of sexuality, morality, and crime. This discourse is enabled in part by a refusal in some quarters to accept the notion that homosexuality is not a sickness or disease, but it is also aided by the fact that the framework that once described homosexuality is still used to describe pedophilia. The APA may have discarded homosexuality from its list of mental disorders, but it remains deeply embedded in popular culture.

If our story were about homosexuality it would end in 1973 with the successful campaign to delist homosexuality as a mental disorder. But if we follow instead the popular narrative about sexual danger and the medical construction of sexual deviation (a construction that was re-labelled paraphilia), the story continues to flow past that landmark moment right through to 1978 when actress Anita Bryant launched a campaign to “Save Our Children” in response the passage of an anti-discrimination ordinance in Miami, Dade County, fought for and won by gay activists who demanded equal rights protection at the municipal level. Bryant spoke out against such measures on the grounds that ordinances protecting homosexuals from discrimination “discriminate against my children’s rights to grow up in a healthy, decent community.” “Save Our Children” was enormously successful; it led the defeat of Florida’s and a number of similar civil rights ordinances across the United States, and more importantly, it galvanized fundamentalist Christians into organized political action (Rimmerman 2002). During her campaign Bryant repeatedly characterised homosexuals as child molesters, and the Moral Majority movement that followed did the same. Despite the delisting of homosexuality as a sexual disorder, the “Save Our Children” campaign and those who took the mantle of sexual conservatism since succeeded in pulling homosexuality, pedophilia, and the corruption of children into an even tighter embrace.

The Natural Order of Disorder

If our concern is the way psychiatry structures our thinking about and plays a contributing role in the criminal justice system’s response to pedophilia, it is more helpful if we set aside the lesbian and gay historical project to distinguish the homosexual from the pedophile and focus instead on the dominant explanatory framework that brought these two social types together in the first place: sexual deviancy. While pedophilia and homosexuality are distinct sexual behaviours, the source of the contemporary narrative for the latter is located in the former. In short, we might today consider the sexual practices in question as fundamentally distinct, but the foundation on which medical and cultural understandings of pedophilia stands is the same. With this before us, the question then can shift from why do we think what we think about pedophilia, to why have we been telling ourselves the same story for almost a century?

The same narrative has played in a seemingly endless loop because it continues to serve the same function: it affirms the status of the (white, middle-class) nuclear heterosexual family as the idealised site for the production and reproduction of

social and political norms. Because the proliferation of discourses about certain types of crime is never prompted by a rise in actual crime rates, social scientists who study twentieth-century sex crime panics have looked to the cultural currents of the time to explain why these panics occur. For example, Estelle Freedman and George Chauncey have argued that during the Great Depression, anxiety about men unhinged from normal family life was the driving force behind the adoption of criminal sexual psychopath laws in America (Freedman 1989). In post-war America, concern that demobilised soldiers and economically liberated wives would not return to home and hearth led to the overwhelming stigmatisation of virtually every adult living outside the institution of marriage, with particularly dire consequences for lesbians and gay men (D'Emilio 1998; Minton 2002; Penn 1991). In his examination of the child sexual abuse panics of the 1970s and 1980s, Steven Angelides (2004) cites changing ideas about masculinity as causal, whereas Paul Okami argues that the expansion of child molestation rhetoric and research during the same period is due to anxiety about the late 1960s and early 1970s emergence of a more sexually permissive culture (Okami 1992).

Phillip Jenkins' longitudinal 1998 study of sex crime panics in twentieth-century America argues that three factors sustain "stranger danger" discourse: demographic change, the issue's broad social, professional and political appeal, and the feminisation of American culture. First, early twentieth-century immigration and the decreasing size of Anglo-Protestant families fuelled the first panic; the post-World War Two baby boom and the 1980s and 1990s baby boomerang drove the second and third. Second, as a social problem child molestation resonates among conservative as well as liberal religious and political groups, social workers, psychiatrists, and other mental health experts, the media, feminists, family values advocates, and parent groups, who are all keen to take action to protect children from sexual danger. Finally, women's increasing political influence over the past century and a quarter has kept the matter on the public and political agenda.

But whereas feminist groups and liberal progressives drew attention to problems within the family, problems like domestic abuse and incest, conservative and family values groups tended to focus on stranger danger, the perceived threats that were external to the family. The latter perspective has dominated throughout the twentieth century, and it is here that most legal, medical, criminal justice, and emotional resources are committed. The "institutionalization of the child protection idea", as Jenkins puts it, and the vast expansion of the treatment and therapy industry means that the investment in the construction of the problem and the solution is so deeply entrenched that to challenge it seems almost impossible. The investment in this particular construction is perhaps most pronounced in the United States, but it is not limited to that country. American approaches to sex crime have influenced Canadians since at least 1948, the British since the late 1970s, and have extended to all English-speaking nations and nations culturally influenced by the United States since the 1990s.

To date, social scientific studies of sex crime panics draw on moral panic theory, an analytical tool developed by British sociologists in the early 1970s for the study of how social problems are constructed. It holds that in times of dramatic change social anxieties are displaced onto folk devils in an identified social group. As

sociologist Jeffrey Weeks astutely observed, ‘sexuality has had a peculiar centrality in such panics, and sexual “deviants” have been omnipresent scapegoats’ (Weeks 1981). This theoretical approach sees moral panics in general and stranger danger discourses in particular as effects of broader power relations. But what if stranger danger discourse was not an effect of power, but rather its tool?

It has been well known for at least a century that most children who are sexually assaulted know the perpetrator, and that the perpetrator is often a family member, yet we channel most of our emotional energy and economic resources into the threat posed by strangers. Since this does little, if anything, to ameliorate sexual dangers faced by children, why do we persist in our current approach? Michel Foucault’s argument that sex is not something that is repressed but rather something that defines the subject, and that this process of meaning-making is an exercise of biopower, can help us understand how stranger danger discourse plays a key role in structuring social relations and systems of regulation in the west.

What is biopower? The modern state, Foucault observed, is a biopolitical state, and its power is exercised not as a force of repression, but as a form of inducement to live, to conduct oneself according to set of norms (Foucault 1978). Biopower is exercised not by threat of death but by “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (p. 140). By what standard should one manage one’s life, and the lives of others? How should bodies be administered? By the late nineteenth century the shift away from regulation according to canonical law toward regulation according to normative standards established by rational, scientific ‘experts’ was well underway.

In the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* Foucault identifies four ‘great strategic unities’ through which biopower unfolded, three of which are most directly relevant to us here: the pedagogisation of children’s sex, the socialisation of procreative behaviour and the psychiatrisation of perverse pleasure. The first produced the masturbating child, the second, the Malthusian couple, and the third, the perverse adult. As he famously argued, what these figures represent is not the containment and repression of sexuality, but the very production of sexuality... “[Sexuality] is not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power” (p. 106).

Criminal sexual psychopath laws are an excellent illustration of the processes described by Foucault. Through them we see the role experts came to play in defining normative behaviour, and the purported use of the law as a tool to “strengthen controls and resistances” rather than simply to punish or take away life (pp. 105–106). As I have shown, these laws were only ostensibly fashioned out of expert medical knowledge, and were used to justify the indefinite incarceration of men who engaged in prohibited sexual acts (excluding heterosexual coitus). The violation of principles of justice (sex psychopath hearings in Canada and the United States did not permit a defence in which opposing psychiatric testimony could be presented) was justified on the ground that sexual psychopaths were not punished for a crime but sentenced to be cured of an illness. Indeterminate sentencing as a

form of punishment is cruel; indeterminate sentencing as a cure is kind. Sex deviants were not being punished, they were being reclaimed.

The invention of the sex psychopath also provides an excellent illustration of how, as anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has convincingly shown, in the biopolitical state social relations came to be conceived of in binary terms. “Technologies of power nurtured in [the emerging] ‘society of normalization,’” she argues, drew on these binary terms to construct “internal enemies” (Stoler 1995, p. 64). Sexuality figured prominently in this process. Historians of sexuality have documented the variety of internal enemies—masturbators, adulterers, prostitutes, homosexuals, pedophiles—that have emerged and subsequently disappeared as objects of intense anxiety and regulation during the past 400 years. As we saw with moral panic theory, social scientists view the construction of sexual outcasts and the campaigns launched to eliminate, reform, or cure them as *effects* of power. They were mere scapegoats for other, systemic social problems such as the economic upheaval caused by economic depression, for example. Conversely, Stoler’s approach suggests that the construction of sexual outcasts is a vector of normalisation processes, “a tactic in the internal fission of society into binary oppositions, and means of creating ‘biologized’ internal enemies, against whom society must defend itself” (p. 59).

Contrary to claims made by moral panic theorists, the function of the sex deviant is not to draw our attention away from what really matters. It exists as a tactic, not merely an effect, of power. As a social type, the pedophile is a product of the psychiatrisation of perverse pleasures. Just as the homosexual defined an emergent heterosexual norm (Katz 1995), the pedophile defined childhood sexual innocence. Children might be the pedophiles’ victims, but it is the integrity of that “tiny, sexually saturated, familial space,” so essential to processes of normalisation, which is attacked (Foucault 1978, p. 47). And because the family is the main instrument of modern technologies of power in the biopolitical state, an attack against a (white) child is an attack against the entire social body. It is for this reason that the state mobilises some of its most expensive resources (behavioural scientists, psychiatrists, and other treatment experts) and most coercive powers (the police, the prison) to manage the threat of pedophilia.

This has not always been so. According to Lynn Sacco, the externalisation of childhood sexual danger can be traced to the late nineteenth century when developments in the world of bacteriology made necessary the transformation of pedophilic acts into fixed identities. Two decades before Krafft-Ebing and Freud debated the frequency of father-daughter incest, advances in bacteriology made it possible to accurately diagnose gonorrhea infection of the vagina in prepubertal girls (gonococcal vaginitis). As a result of this advance, doctors were confronted with incontrovertible evidence that an extraordinary number of young girls had had genital-to-genital contact. Because so many cases involved girls under five, fathers seemed the most likely source of infection. Yet, most doctors refused to accept this possibility. When Krafft-Ebing argued it is “incomprehensible that an adult of full virility, and mentally sound, should indulge in sexual abuses with children” and declared men who had sex with children “not ordinary,” he simultaneously enabled the medical denial of incest and created a new subject upon whom the problem

could be displaced (Sacco 2009, p. 106).⁶ It was at this historical conjuncture that the pedophile, like the homosexual, became “a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality.... It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature.... [the sexual touching of children] had been a temporary aberration; the [pedophile] was now a species” (Foucault, p. 43).

The creation of internal enemies is not a consequence of the construction and maintenance of the family as normative. It is a means to establish and indeed construct the very norm upon which its existence depends. The “stranger” in stranger danger affirms the white, middle-class, traditional (gendered and hierarchical, nuclear and heterosexual) family as the singular institution that preserves, protects, and secures children’s physical and emotional safety. It naturalises and idealises modern family life, and in the process subsumes family violence. Families can be dangerous places for children, but the stranger danger narrative re-asserts the family as the idealised site for the production and reproduction of social norms, as an incubator for processes of normalisation.

The delisting of pedophilia, and perhaps all of the paraphilias, might open a space where alternate ideas about adult and child sexuality could emerge, but delisting alone is not sufficient. As historian Linda Gordon noted, the secrecy surrounding incest is constructed not just by experts, but by the many people who do not want to believe in its existence, including perpetrators, mothers, neighbours, and family friends (Gordon 1989). Nor will it be enough to know “the truth” about children and sexual danger, since as historians have shown countless empirical studies that challenge the myth of stranger danger produced over the last 100 years have failed to uproot the stranger danger narrative.

It is not only the myth of stranger danger that needs to be attacked or the truth about incest that needs to be proclaimed. We also need to pull apart normal/abnormal, public/private and adult/child binaries, binaries that cannot be isolated from the unified social field in which a whole host of binary oppositions, including man/woman, homo/hetero, white/black, civilised/savage, abled/disabled, and so on, operate. For example, contemporary discourses about pedophilia and stranger danger rely on systems of racial knowledge in order to produce the normative family this discourse sustains. In the present day, when the pedophile (and the homosexual) emerges into public discourse, he is always white. This is because in the Western sexual domain, the racial “other” already signifies either sexual excess or lack, whereas those racially marked as white signify the norm. The sexual abnormality of the “other” is therefore normalised in white Western culture. Under colonialism, Europeans constructed people of black African heritage as sexually uncivilised (men and women are unrestrained), Asians as over civilised (men and women are overly restrained), and indigenous peoples of the Americas as debased. But as

⁶ Geertje Mak examines the class-inflected understanding of incest and pedophilia in the work of Krafft-Ebing and Freud in “Incest, Freud and class: scientia sexualis and the boundaries of bourgeois civilization,” Paper ESSH-conference Lisbon, Feb 27–Mar 1 2008.

compared to what? All are assessed in relationship to a presumably stable, white anglo-Christian norm.

That non-whites are regarded as deviant or aberrant has been well examined by social scientists, but the way that whiteness, which can only come to signify the norm by and through the existence of the racial other, functions to organise our thinking about sexuality is less considered, and this is perhaps especially the case in the current literature regarding the construction of the pedophile as a “type.” But as most people of colour know all too well, constructions of race play a determinative role in how sexual crime is perceived. If the victim of a sex crime is a person of colour, and his or her assailant is also a person of colour, the incident is typically read by the mainstream (white) news media and public as, at worst, a reflection on that community’s “race”, or at best, a problem particular and of concern to that community. If the victim is white and the assailant a person of colour, the crime is read through the lens of racial conflict and difference. The mainstream (white) community needs to be on guard against the threat posed by certain non-white groups. Only when both the assailant and the victim are white is the assault read as a broad social problem affecting “everyone”.

Race, then, may appear to be absent from public and expert discourses about pedophilia, but it is always present, contributing to a much broader ideological project that structures an even wider range of social, economic and political relations. By understanding how normalisation processes draw on racial logics to map out normative and non-normative behaviours, we can see the presence or normalizing discourses as an organizing principle in the very fact of its absence. It is, in short, part of the same tactic of rule that draws on the pedophile and stranger danger to affirm the white heterosexual nuclear family as the normative social unit. To argue that the othering of non-whites, of homosexuals, and of pedophiles is part of the same tactic of rule is not to say that the specific acts attributed to each group are morally or ethically commensurate, of course. It is, rather, to say that as tropes these social types exist in complementarity; they collectively define the field of normative and non-normative sexual types, and constitute our internal enemies.

Race, of course, is just one of a series of critical binaries. Any critical intervention against structures of thought and narrative forms that animate stories about sexual danger must take into account the full range of characters who populate the margins of social life. These links become so much more evident when we broaden the question we ask out from a narrow concern with processes that define sexual normality and abnormality to consider how this process is implicated in the much broader ideological project of defining and defending “civilised society.”

Conclusion

However we want to think about pedophilia, hebophilia, and intergenerational sex, to begin to do so differently requires us to address the fact that the immediate and extended family is sometimes the site of sexual danger and emotional neglect. Only by doing so will the need to displace sexual danger onto an ‘enemy within’ dissipate. Furthermore, this project requires us to see how the normative family is

saturated by race as well as sex. It requires us to investigate the full range of inclusions and exclusions that organize social life simultaneously.

Social scientists have made a major contribution to our understanding of why particular sex panics occur when they do. They have convincingly demonstrated that the various iterations of the sexual predator are based a composite of sexually-laden social prejudices. Yet such insights have had almost no impact on contemporary discourses about pedophilia. As Philip Jenkins argues, “the consensus is that although earlier panics arose from ignorance, hysteria and self-interest, contemporary formulations of child abuse are sober depictions of objective truth” (Jenkins 1998, p. 6). This, despite the fact that the “objective truths” about pedophilia are virtually the same objective truths that described homosexuality half a century ago, truths which have been discarded as the cultural detritus of the cold war era. Unpacking historical meanings given to adult-child sex and to its presumed causes and effects is an important step toward rethinking how we respond to it when it happens, and more broadly, to our understanding of child sexuality.

Sex crime and sexual assault are serious and very real personal and political issues that must be taken seriously. Over the past century we have turned increasingly to the psy disciplines to regulate sexual behaviour, but this approach has failed. Until we replace the story of sexuality as a story of mental wellness and illness, we will remain stuck in the same narrative loop. The first step is to abandon a medical approach to sexuality; the next and more difficult task will be to change the way we think about family so that it no longer needs a stranger against which it must, at all costs and any cost, be defended.

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